

HIGH-SEAS HOT RODS

**Flaring fins, chrome trim and curved windshields
add auto-styled appeal to the speedboats of 1957**

by EZRA BOWEN

Until 17 months ago, a boat was a boat and, by and large, looked like a boat. Today, as the pictures on those pages show, things have changed; boats have begun looking like something else, namely automobiles, and the musty traditions of speedboat design have been all but drowned in a welter of glittering chrome and swept-back, high-finned bodylines.

It all started with two exhibits at the New York Boat Show in January 1956. Over at one end of the hall that year, the Lone Star Company of Grand Prairie, Texas introduced the Meteor, a blunt-nosed little runabout with the look of a Porsche that wandered into a marine exhibit by mistake. It had auto headlights, a low stubby bow, tail fins and a sporty cockpit for

four people. Across the floor at the same show, the Evinrude people trotted out another seagoing hot rod. This one, designed by famed Auto Styler Brooks Stevens, was called the Lark. It featured a pair of soaring tail fins, bucket seats and matched chrome hardware.

Viewing these phenomena, a lot of traditionalists stepped back and held their noses. But a lot more nonconformists stepped forward holding large clusters of dollar bills. According to Evinrude, the Lark was the hit of the show. Lone Star was just as happy with its little speedster. More impressive to the men in the industry, however, was the fact that no less than

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GOLDEN WASP

Thirteen-foot Golden Wasp is raciest model in Wizard Boat's line of fiber-glass runabouts. Designed for outboard powering, she seats two people, has twin curved windshields, auto-styled upholstery in cockpit.



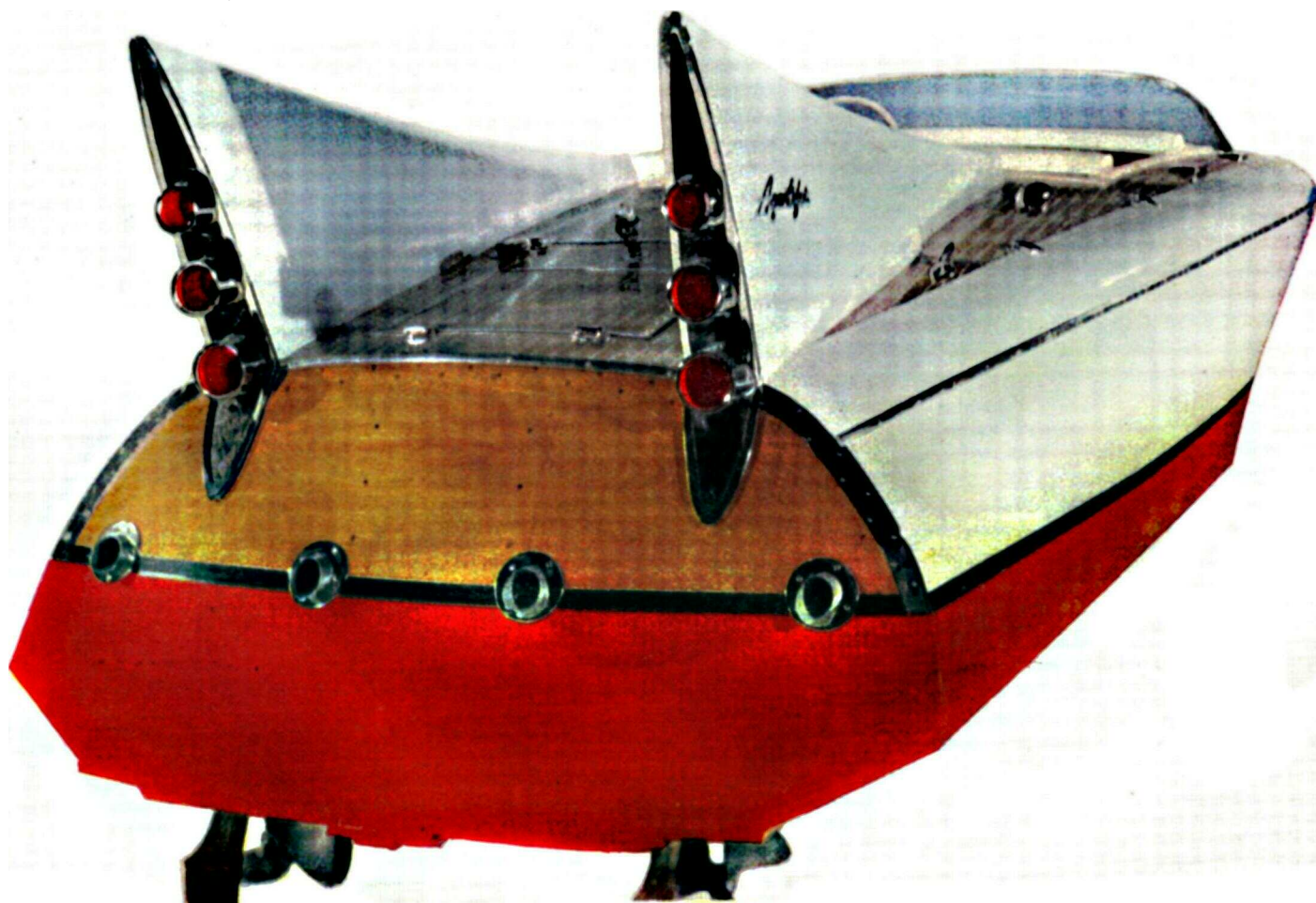
SHOOTING STAR

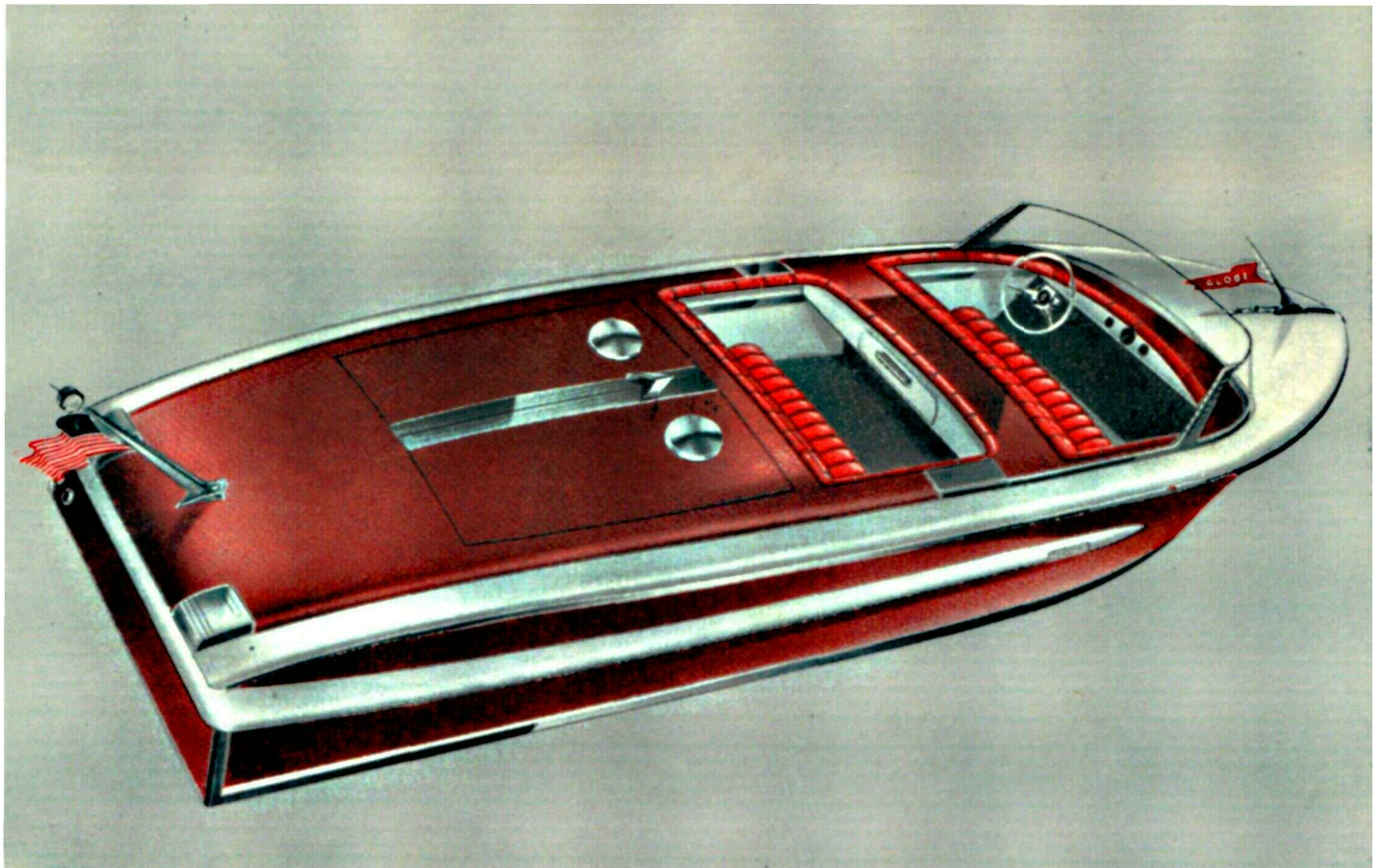
Made by Switzer Craft in Crystal Lake, Ill. Shooting Star has reverse curves, radical flare-out in bow design, rumble seat in rear. Boat is 15 feet long, travels over 34 mph with Mercury Mark 30 engine. Cost \$895



AQUILIFER

Ancarrow Marine's 24 foot Aquilifer, with soaring tail fins, glistening chromium trim, is aristocrat of auto-Styled inboards. Powered by two Cadillac CM 300 engines, she can make 65 mph, costs \$19,450 complete.





FIRST AUTO-STYLED BOAT ever put into production was 21-foot Globe Mastercraft, designed by Brooks Stevens in 1945. Unlike conventional boats—or even cars—of its time, Mastercraft had such futuristic styling features as wrap-around windshield,

crash-padded cockpit, two-spoke plastic steering wheel, specially designed and integrated deck hardware, two-toning of major hull areas, airfoil-type rub rail extending around stern and swept-down sheer line that tapered toward water at after end of boat.

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38 accredited boat builders wrote Evinrude asking for the plans of the Lark. The rush to auto styling was on. And when the 1957 Boat Show opened at the New York Coliseum, instead of two lonely prototypes the place was filled with automotive hybrids.

"When we introduced the Lark," said Stevens recently, "we presented an extreme exhibitionist version of what might come. By January of 1957, that exhibitionism had become a production reality." He then proceeded to pinpoint the man most responsible for the whole auto-styling revolution.

"I would say," he offered, "that I inspired it."

Any self-proclaimed pioneer is on shaky ground in the design field, where a flat claim of a first in styling will always bring people striding down from pedestals or crawling out from under rocks waving the plans of the streamlined something they whipped up in 1910. But Stevens is quite fearless in expressing his ideas and, in this case, he has some weighty historical arguments on his side.

In pre-World War II days, he had earned a name for himself as an industrial designer, particularly in the automotive field, where he styled an impressive collection of custom car bodies, trucks, buses and land cruisers. Then he branched out into outboard motors, as a style consultant for Evinrude. That led to experiments in the modernization of boat design.

"In 1941," he said, "I did a prophetic rendering of what I felt the postwar boat would be. It had the first wrap-around windshield with which we predicted the trend not only in boats but in automobiles too. We also began to

integrate deck hardware—instead of taking a cleat from here and a chock from there, we made it all to match. And the bow was different. It had an extreme downward curve. Finally, we predicted the idea of the swept-down sheer line—and you can see it today in that big speedboat with all the fins, the Aquilifer (*see page 42*). This was the first concept of this type of design. Four years later we developed it into a final product in the Globe Mastercraft."

The Globe Mastercraft, designed in 1945, was, according to Stevens, the first successful auto-styled boat ever put out on a production basis. As the original drawing at the top of the page shows, the Globe picked up and developed the idea of the convex sheer line, wrap-around windshield and integrated hardware, and introduced a number of other new concepts as well, all of which, when molded together, added up to a speedboat that was years ahead of the competition. "The crash-padded cockpit," said Stevens, "was certainly the first of its kind in a production boat. So was the styled plastic steering wheel. This was also one of the first uses of two-toning in major hull areas, rather than the random strip planking of different tones that was popular at the time. And we definitely pioneered in the curved, airfoil rub rail. You'll notice how it widens as the tumble home of the boat narrows down and how it goes all around the stern.

"This whole line was introduced at the New York Boat Show in 1946, and again at Los Angeles later the same year. At Los Angeles we won a prize for the best contribution to boat design, or something."

While the Globe won a prize, it did not, unfortunately, gather many customers. But it did bring enough publicity for Stevens to be called by Chris-Craft to produce a set of sample designs for a projected bridge-deck cruiser (*right*).

Beyond that, however, the principles of auto styling had to wait nearly a decade for public demand to catch up.

"The Globe was embryonic and premature," Stevens admits today. "It was the weak voice in the wilderness of convention. But we were convinced it was going to come.

"You see, there was far greater resistance among the educated conventionalists in boating than in cars. In 1946, the boating public was still the connoisseur, the one that rang bells and hoisted sails and liked the smell of hemp. But then the real postwar market developed. The public found it had more leisure time. And the outboard people developed remote controls. Now, *there* was the most significant development of the decade. As soon as you rigged up an outboard with a push-button starter, remote throttle and clutch, you created a whole new market. Most important, you got the housewife, who certainly didn't go out in the old days when you had to yank on a rope to start the motor. But as soon as she could push a button and touch a lever, it was *she* who went for a boat ride and not just the old man.

"We created a whole new concept for the word yachtsman. It meant the lathe operator, the garage attendant; it meant family boating for the weekend. Suddenly we were way beyond, thousands beyond the concepts of the connoisseur in the blue coat and white pants. And this new yachtsman would look for water transportation with the same eye that he looked for automotive transportation. Why? Because he had the swept-back thing in his garage. He couldn't help but be swayed by what Detroit was doing to him."

With the public finally warmed up to auto styling, Stevens scored his first big success in the yachting world. It happened in 1954 when William Scott, Executive Vice-president of Outboard Marine, proposed to Stevens that he take their top horsepower outboard motor and dress it up

STREAMLINED CRUISER, drawn in 1946, was one of half-dozen Stevens concepts submitted to Chris-Craft to show potential of new automotive look in production-line pleasure boats. For this design, Stevens borrowed convex sheer lines, integrated



TREND-SETTER Brooks Stevens projected first auto-styled boat designs in 1941, set off current boom with Evinrude Lark at New York Boat Show in January 1956.

with custom trim, much in the manner that Cadillac had dressed up their top model car to get the Eldorado.

"Again we were taking our lead from the automakers," Stevens explained. "We figured that the new American yachtsman, the 21-foot buyer, the twin-engine buyer, was involving himself in a \$2,100 outfit; and why not have it the best-looking thing that pulled up to the yacht club? So we embarked on the Evinrude Lark and the Johnson Javelin."

These were the names Outboard Marine gave to its two outboard Eldorados. They were announced in September of 1955 and were an immediate success. The first year they were out, three quarters of the sales in the top horsepower group were in these luxury motors.

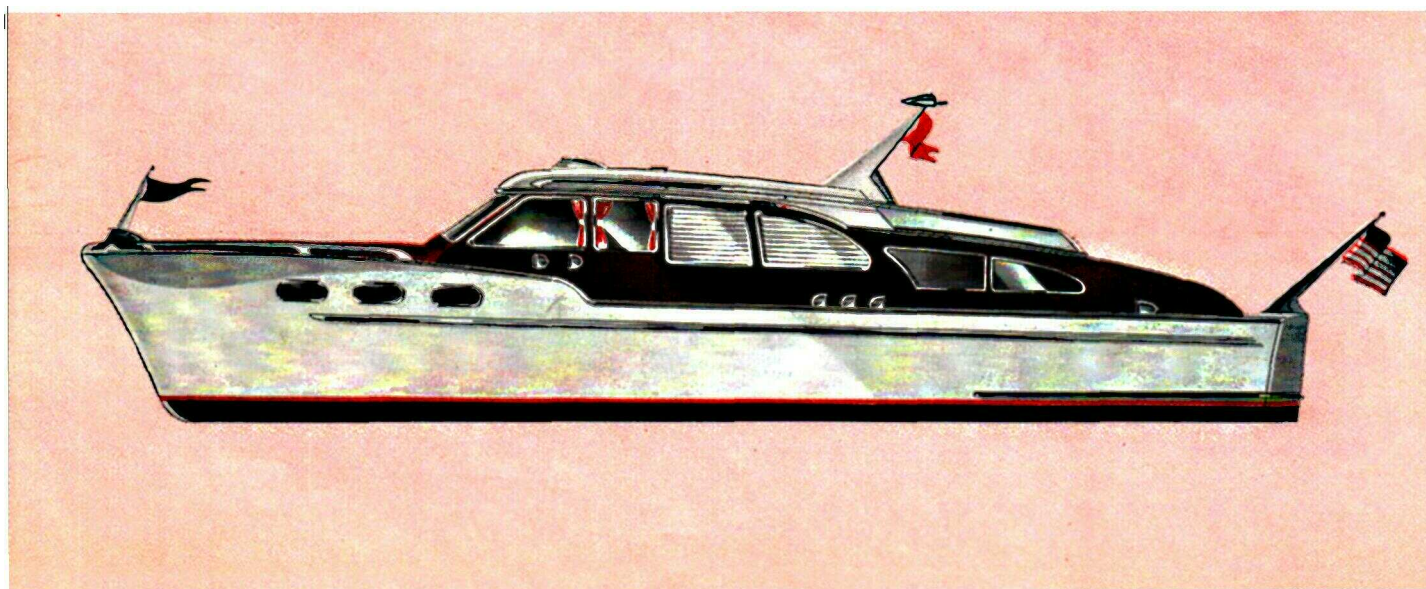
"This meant," said Stevens, "that our American buyer, who was keeping up with the Joneses, wanted that luxury motor out of pure pride of ownership. It's a real ego builder. It doesn't drive the boat any faster, but it pleases him. And I say thank God for him, especially when you multiply him by 100,000. Why, if everybody was dead practical, there wouldn't be any lights on. We'd all be asleep in bed."

Brooks Stevens and Outboard Marine were definitely not asleep in bed. With the Lark and Javelin solidly launched, they began to cast around for something that would catch the eye of the public at the 1956 New York Boat Show. They needed something new; they needed something to make people talk. A dream engine was suggested, but Stevens knocked down the idea on two counts. First, if it was too radical, they would be laughed at in their own field. Second, if it was too good it might render obsolete their going line. Then Stevens brought up the idea of a new type of boat.

"I told Mr. Scott," he said, "that we should take the bull by the horns and prophesy for our related industry. I said,

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hardware from design of Globe Mastercraft, added racy superstructure, elongated ports, modified clipper bow, streamlined ventilators and swept-back pilot windows to produce a cabin cruiser that would give impression of motion even when tied to dock.



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"Let's build, for the first time, a dream boat, with styling integrated with the Lark."

Scott liked the idea, and Stevens went to work on a set of plans. He based his whole concept on sports-car design. "How could I go wrong?" he asked. "Look at the way people were going for the Jaguar, the MG, the Mercedes-Benz and for our American offerings, the Thunderbird and the Corvette. Why not a sports boat, for a guy to take his blonde out in? In designing this boat, I put the gearshift in the middle, just the way it is in a Jaguar and a lot of the others. I made two bucket seats, and added trim, coloration—the whole thing. I even went so far as to put in an airplane-type steering wheel.

"The fins were there because fins were it—because fins were going to *be* it. This was before Chrysler. I exaggerated. I wanted a flamboyant conversation piece. But in doing it, I at least incorporated a retractable ski-tow reel inside the fins. In other words I made a functional reason for my foppery."

With the Lark Runabout, there is no doubt that Stevens tickled a very delicate nerve in the American public. "People saw the romance of the fast-looking boat," said Stevens,

LARK RUNABOUT was Stevens' biggest shocker which, designed for Evinrude as promotional come-on, burst on boating world in 1956. Stevens picked color and trim to reflect styling of Lark engine, went all out with bucket seats and floor controls like



LARK ENGINE by Stevens first came out in September 1955, is custom version of top horsepower motor in Evinrude line.

trends and the merchandising ability of any design—that is, whether it can ring the cash register. And I'm very much in favor of the cash register. I'm only on a minor crusade for art, because I won't live long enough to change the entire public concept of art. But we can see the results

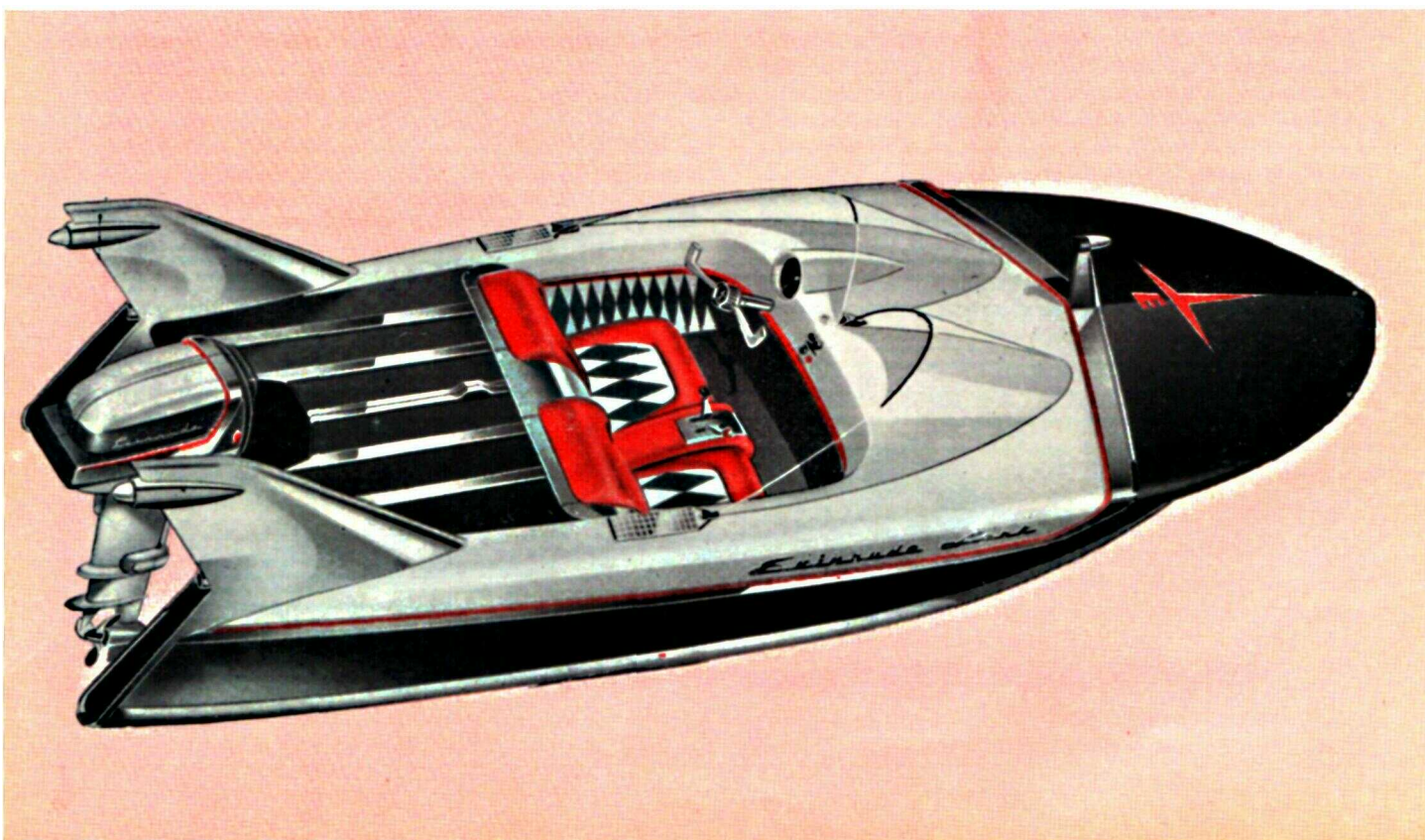
"the chic boat for the youth of the nation. And," he added, "there are plenty of 60-year-old youths riding around up in suburbs with hats on.

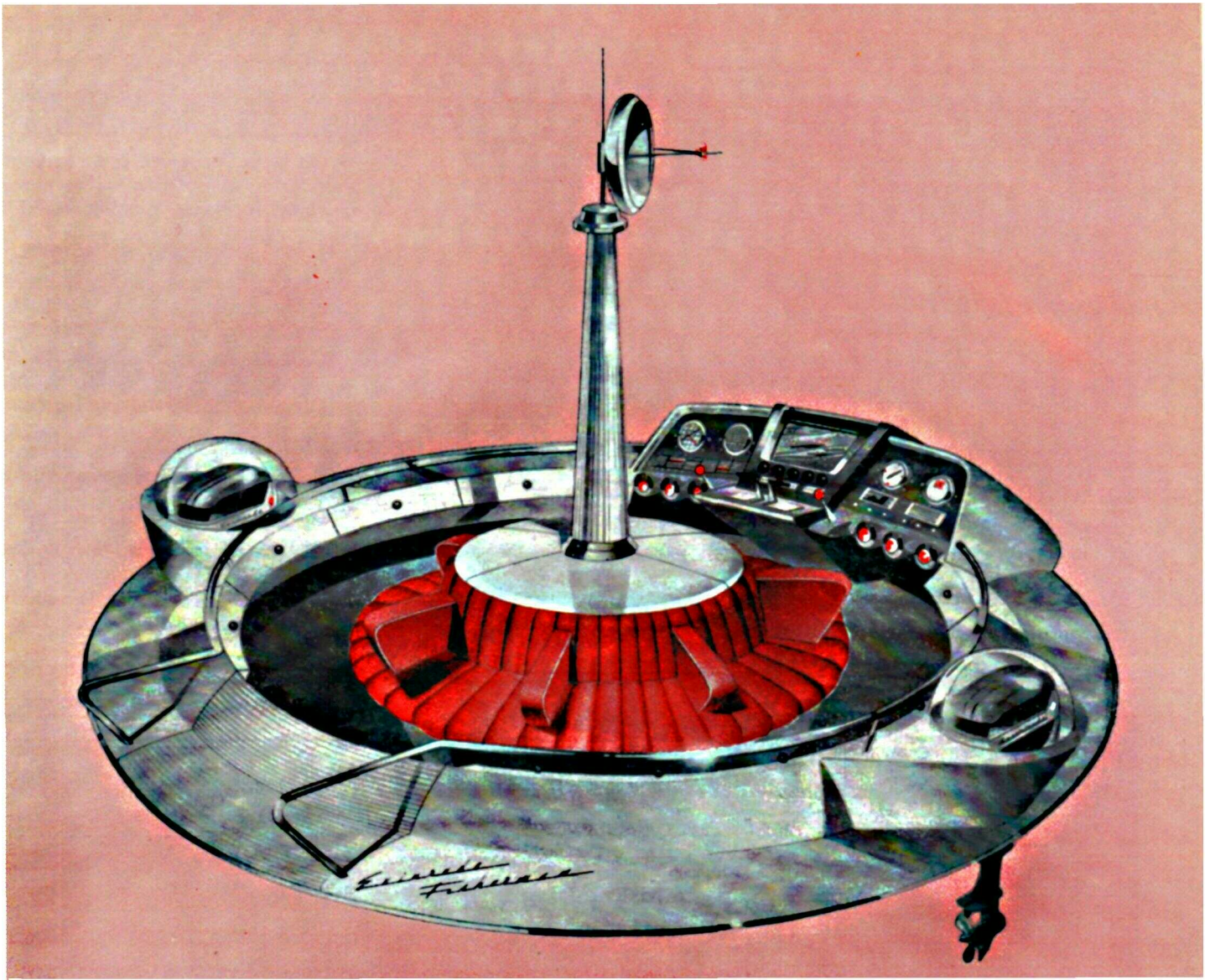
"I know that in retrospect these things do sound egotistical, but when the exhibit first opened, I stood there near the Lark, almost fanatical, 10 hours a day to hear what the public said. The first day or two there was interesting public acclaim—gee whiz; hey, dad; look, mom. But I also at first got a lot of really scathing comment from the boat boys. But I expected it. I wanted to jolt the industry and feel them be jolted. And I felt they'd come around. I mean, how could they be so ostrichish when the other 100,000 were coming forward with the greenbacks?

"So, after three days, they came around. I think it was three things: one, the initial shock wearing off; two, the exhibit had unquestionably drawn more comment than any at the show; and, three, it was, 'Look, fellas, shall we fight this thing when it's what the customers want?'

"The point is, you absolutely must consider public acceptance of design

those in U.S. and European sports cars, dual curved windscreens, spectacular tail fins that predated trend in both boats and cars. Lark revolutionized runabout styles, has since been taken over by Cadillac Marine as the Sea Lark, which retails for \$1,975.





LATEST SHOCKER designed by Stevens is round, two-engined Evinrude Fisherman introduced at 1957 Boat Show. Inspired by flying-saucer fad, Fisherman has plastic nacelles over engines, mocked-up radar mast complete with folding parasol for sunny

days, sonar devices and TV screen to help locate fish. One of most successful promotion gambits in history of boat industry, Evinrude Fisherman was launched for first time in Wisconsin three weeks ago, actually proved safe, maneuverable in flat water.

of the Lark design everywhere, and I think we can say that this thing did its job, that it caught on."

The furor over the Lark had hardly commenced, however, when Stevens and Outboard Marine began laying plans for their big shocker of 1957 (see *drawing above*). This time it was Howard Larson, Evinrude Director of Sales, who had the idea. He suggested they project something for the fisherman and told Stevens to go all out with the most radical design he could think of.

"And he really meant all out," said Stevens. "He told me he didn't care if it was round. That idea stuck. Round. Why not a round boat? Especially with all the business of flying saucers. How silly could I be not to take a ride on that one?"

The reaction at the 1957 show was, again, a bonanza for Stevens and Evinrude. "We got bushels of letters," said Stevens. "I got one from a guy—you never heard such a thing. I was not only a charlatan, I was dangerous. I was likely to take people out and drown them. But do you know, we had a launching on the Milwaukee River the other day, at the Evinrude test station, and that thing handled like a dream. It can turn on its own axis, and you

can walk around it just like on a yacht. Now, this doesn't mean we're going into the round boat business. But Evinrude has requests from resort owners who are thinking in terms of fishing discs. We had one resort owner from northern Wisconsin who wanted to buy half a dozen of them, just on the strength of the exhibit at the New York Show."

With the public already sold on auto styling and apparently willing now to consider even a flying saucer, Stevens is working harder than ever—toward his *next* big shocker. In fact, he is at this moment getting ready to build the bomb that Evinrude plans to drop on the 1958 Boat Show. "We've got it approved and ready for construction," he said. "I'm amazed that no one thought of this idea before. But they just don't think these things out. I don't think some of these guys ever tried to live aboard a cruiser. I can't tell you what it is, but I can say this. With the Lark, I created something futuristic and fanciful. With the saucer, I was way out in left field. I mean, it has some practicality but basically it was a shrieker. Now I'm reverting back to a practical level. And this one is so good that when it's shown, everybody is going to jump on it, because this thing is the *answer*."